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"IBAs have the unique power to unite people, communities, and organizations in proactive bird conservation, one place at a time"

- Frank Gill, Senior Ornithologist, National Audubon Society



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SITE PROFILE

Name: Santa Ynez River Valley
State: US-CA
Counties: Santa Barbara
Site Status: Recognized

Site Description:

This IBA refers to the intact riparian habitat from Hwy. 101 (vic. Buellton) west through the broad agricultural lands west of Lompoc. The habitat of this IBA, bottomland riparian woodland along an unchannelized stream, is dominated by dense willows and scattered cottonwoods. This area supports one of the most significant and little-studied riparian systems in central California, and one of the two best examples of lowland riparian habitat in Santa Barbara County (the other being the upper Santa Ynez River to the east). The habitat east of Buellton (Santa Ynez Valley), while restorable, is patchy and intensively grazed/farmed to Lake Cachuma. The coastal zone, including the mouth of the Santa Ynez River, is treated as the Vandenberg Air Force Base IBA.

Ornithological Summary:

The lower Santa Ynez River supports a large, poorly-known population of Southwestern Willow Flycatchers, with the largest colony located about five miles west of Buellton. Least Bell's Vireo breed the length of the river as well, and even Yellow-billed Cuckoo has been recorded recently in summer along Sweeny Rd. (July 2000, DC), which follows the north side of the river east of Lompoc. Golden Eagle is a regular sight in summer, and probably breeds in the hills to the south (Lehman 1994). Purple Martin have maintained one of their southernmost colonies in massive Western Sycamores along a nearby tributary of the Santa Ynez, Nojoqui Creek, (within Nojoqui Falls County Park, five miles south of Buellton), and may eventually colonize this IBA. The oak savannah on either side of the river supports grassland birds, including wintering raptors (esp. Ferruginous Hawk). Tricolored Blackbirds breed in scattered farm ponds, and Yellow-billed Magpie is found in the eastern portion of this IBA near the southern edge of its global range.

Help us learn more about the birds at this IBA! Enter your birding data online at California eBird! (<http://ebird.org/california/>)

Conservation Issues:

The lower Santa Ynez River flows entirely through private lands, with virtually no guidelines or mandates on how the river should be managed for conservation. The conversion of ranches from low-density cattle grazing to vineyards and/or housing developments continues unabated, and it is likely that the next decade or so will see a dramatic loss of open space in the lower Santa Ynez watershed. Conservation easements and acquisitions could forestall the transformation of this unique lowland riparian system.

Citation: National Audubon Society 2008. Important Bird Areas in the U.S.
 Available at <http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba> 08/2008



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Name: Vandenberg Air Force Base

State: US-CA

Counties: Santa Barbara

Site Status: Recognized

Site Description:

Vandenberg Air Force Base covers nearly 100,000 acres on the coast of northern Santa Barbara County, just north of Pt. Concepcion. Like Camp Pendleton in northern San Diego County, it is a DoD property that could easily qualify as a national park with its spectacular scenery and rich natural resources. Bisected by the Santa Ynez River (see above), it extends east to near Lompoc (Harris Grade Rd./ Miguelito Rd.) and supports a staggering diversity of habitats, from coastal Bishop Pine forest to tidal marsh to mature cottonwood-willow riparian woodland. It also protects several plant and animal taxa found nowhere else on earth, including an endemic California plant community, Burton Mesa Chaparral, found wholly within its borders. Barka Slough, along the San Antonio River, is one of the largest natural freshwater marshes in the bioregion, and another example of this marsh/riparian habitat is maintained at a series of waterfowl management ponds west of Lompoc. About 97% of the base is maintained in essentially a wild state (A. Naydol, Chief, Natural Resources Dept., VAFB, in litt.).

Ornithological Summary:

The list of the sensitive birds at this IBA reads like a who's-who list for rare species. The remote headlands around Pt. Arguello support the farthest-south site on the mainland for breeding seabirds (mainly Pelagic Cormorant and Pigeon Guillemot, but also a handful Rhinoceros Auklet, fide Carter et al. 1992). The broad, sandy beaches (esp. vic. Purisima Point and Santa Ynez River mouth) offer scarce nesting habitat for Least Tern (up to 100 pr.) and one of the state's largest population of breeding and wintering Snowy Plover (up to 250 pr. have bred, fide A. Naydol). The tidal marsh and mudflats at the mouth of the Santa Ynez River can host hundreds of migrant and winter waterbirds, particularly when the river is allowed to reach the ocean, and supports a colony of saltmarsh-nesting Savannah Sparrows of an undetermined subspecies. Riparian and freshwater marsh birds such as Least Bittern and Yellow-breasted Chats breed in small numbers, and Southwestern Willow Flycatchers maintain a nesting colony at the waterfowl ponds, and could re-colonize the extensive habitat at Barka Slough. The scrub habitats, including the Burton Mesa Chaparral north of the Santa Ynez River, supports one of the largest colonies of the scarce Bell's Sage Sparrow in Central California, with up to 325 breeding pairs (A. Naydol, unpubl. data). Finally, open-country birds occur here in numbers unprecedented elsewhere on the Central Coast, with Ferruginous Hawk, Burrowing Owl and Mountain Plover (up to 27 birds in 1997, Ibid) occurring in winter and Grasshopper Sparrow breeding.

Help us learn more about the birds at this IBA! Enter your birding data online at California eBird! (<http://ebird.org/california/>)

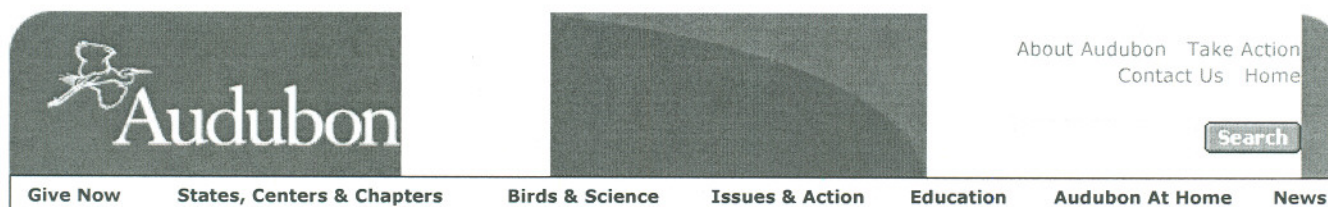
Conservation Issues:

Vandenberg has made admirable efforts to maintain suitable habitat for sensitive species on the base, including the removal of cattle from about a third of former grazing land (and from all wetlands and oak woodlands, A. Naydol, in litt.). Habitat known to support federally threatened and endangered species (e.g. Peregrine Falcon, Least Tern, Snowy Plover) is "totally protected", according to A. Naydol (in litt.). The biggest threat is now from exotic plant invasion, especially ice plant, Veldt grass, and European Beach Grass along the coast and tamarisk in riparian areas. Fires burning sensitive habitat (e.g. recently at Barka Slough) remain a constant threat. A local Audubon chapter, La Purisima, has recently cultivated a relationship with the base and is involved with

surveying birds and small-scale habitat restoration at the waterfowl ponds. However, as a DoD installation whose primary mission is military preparedness (and not resource conservation), the resources on Vandenberg will probably remain somewhat threatened for the foreseeable future.

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What is an Important Bird Area?

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"Celebrating the Centennial with Important Bird Areas" - Click to download this brochure, highlighting the history of Audubon's site conservation efforts. (file in "zip" format, 500k)

Important Bird Areas, or IBAs, are sites that provide essential habitat for one or more species of bird. IBAs include sites for breeding, wintering, and/or migrating birds. IBAs may be a few acres or thousands of acres, but usually they are discrete sites that stand out from the surrounding landscape. IBAs may include public or private lands, or both, and they may be protected or unprotected.

To qualify as an IBA, sites must satisfy at least one of the following criteria. The site must support:

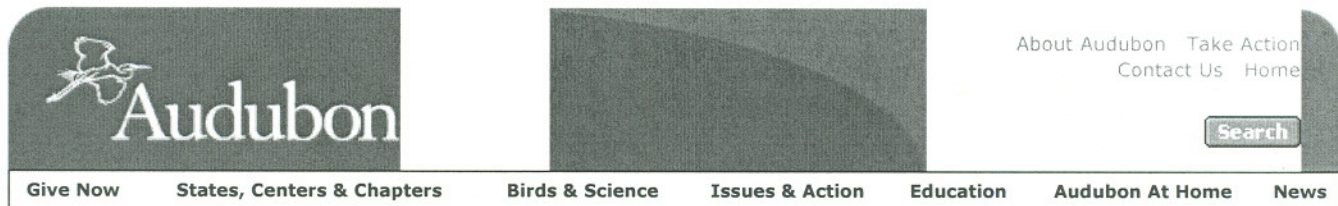
- Species of conservation concern (e.g. threatened and endangered species)
- Restricted-ranges species (species vulnerable because they are not widely distributed)
- Species that are vulnerable because their populations are concentrated in one general habitat type or biome
- Species, or groups of similar species (such as waterfowl or shorebirds), that are vulnerable because they occur at high densities due to their congregatory behavior



Important Bird Areas often support a significant proportion of one or more species' total population. In winter, the Niagara River hosts up to 20% of the entire population of Bonaparte's Gulls, making it a globally significant IBA.

Identification of a site as an IBA indicates it's unique importance for birds. Nonetheless, some IBAs are of greater significance than others. A site may be important at the global, continental, or state level. The IBA identification process provides a data-driven means for cataloging the most important sites for birds throughout the country and the world. The use of a hierarchical classification system further helps to establish priorities for conservation efforts.

Throughout the IBA process, the status of sites are characterized by the following terms: *Potential, Nominated, Identified, Recognized, Pending, Rejected, Delisted, Merged*. See [definitions](#) of Status Terms.


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Status of Important Bird Areas

IBAs are categorized by the following **STATUS** terms:

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- **POTENTIAL** - Potential IBAs may meet IBA criteria. A list of potential sites is one of the first things an IBA Coordinator puts together when beginning the process of identifying sites at the state level.
- **NOMINATED** - Nominated IBAs are sites for which a nomination package has been completed and are most likely to meet IBA criteria. Nomination forms are completed by the IBA Coordinator, members of the IBA technical committee, volunteers, the land manager(s) or owner(s), or some other interested individual(s).
- **IDENTIFIED** - Identified IBAs are sites that have been reviewed by a state technical committee and have been determined to meet IBA criteria at the state level. Sites are identified based on the occurrence of birds at a site and therefore their value to birds and bird conservation. Sites are evaluated based on the number of individuals of particular species occurring at the site and whether those numbers meet the defined criteria. Additionally, habitat quality and the stability of that habitat may also be a factor, in conjunction with criteria, for identifying an IBA.
- **RECOGNIZED** - Recognized IBAs are identified IBAs that have been announced to the public. Recognition of an IBA could occur through a public ceremony, press release, or some other mechanism that makes it widely known that this site is part of a global network of places identified for their outstanding value to bird conservation. In many cases, recognition may mean that a landowner has been notified and has approved of the fact that the property has been identified as an IBA; however, recognition does not require landowner approval.
- **PENDING** - Pending IBAs are sites that have been nominated and evaluated by a technical committee but are in need of additional information, such as more bird population data, additional habitat, threat, and/or landuse data, before it can be adequately evaluated against IBA criteria.
- **REJECTED** - Rejected IBAs are sites that were previously listed as potential or nominated, but were ultimately determined through a technical committee review process to not meet IBA criteria. These sites could be nominated again if new information is obtained.
- **DELISTED** - Delisted IBAs are sites that were previously listed as identified or recognized, but have been removed from one of those lists because of degradation to the site, change in bird populations, or some other reason that becomes clear through new information.
- **MERGED** - a site that has been added to another IBA and is no longer considered an individual IBA. A merged site was previously listed as an individual Potential, Nominated, Identified or Recognized IBA, but is no longer a single IBA because the boundaries of the site have been included with those of another IBA. Data associated with IBAs that have been merged should now be included in the IBA the site was merged with.